

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS¹

1. (Previously Presented): A conversation support system for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:

enrolling means for enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;

imparting means for imparting a virtual mobile telephone to each avatar in said shared virtual space, said virtual mobile telephone being usable within said shared virtual space;

determination means for determining, in response to a call to a virtual mobile telephone, whether a calling party who originated said call exists in said shared virtual space; and

connecting means for executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made by said determination means.

2. (Previously Presented): The conversation support system according to claim 1, wherein, if said calling party originated said call from a telephone in the real world, said connecting means establishes a connection with said calling party through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

3. (Previously Presented): The conversation support system according to claim 1, wherein, if said calling party originated said call from a telephone in another virtual space, said connecting means establishes a connection with said telephone in said another virtual space or executes message transfer.

¹ This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

4. (Previously Presented): The conversation support system according to claim 1, wherein said connecting means receives said call from a telephone in the real world or a virtual telephone in another virtual space and connects the received call to a virtual mobile telephone of a called avatar in said shared virtual space.

5. (Previously Presented): A conversation support system for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:

enrolling means for enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;

imparting means for imparting a virtual public telephone usable by any enrolled avatar to said shared virtual space at a predetermined place;

determination means for determining, in response to a call to said virtual public telephone, whether a calling party who originated said call exists in said shared virtual space; and

connecting means for executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made by said determination means.

6. (Previously Presented): The conversation support system according to claim 5, wherein, if said calling party originated said call from a telephone in the real world, said connecting means establishes a connection with said calling party through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

7. (Previously Presented): The conversation support system according to claim 5, wherein, if said caller originated said call from a telephone in another virtual space, said connecting means establishes a connection with said telephone in said another virtual space or executes message transfer.

8. (Previously Presented): A conversation support method for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:

enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;
imparting a virtual mobile telephone to each avatar in said shared virtual space, said virtual mobile telephone being usable within said shared virtual space;
determining, in response to a call to a virtual mobile telephone, whether a calling party who originated said call exists in said shared virtual space; and
executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made in said determination step.

9. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 8, wherein, if said calling party originated said call from a telephone in the real world, said connecting step establishes a connection with said calling party through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

10. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 8, wherein, if said calling party originated said call from a telephone in another virtual space, said connecting step establishes a connection with said telephone in said another virtual space or executes message transfer.

11. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 8, further comprising:

receiving a call from a telephone in the real world or a telephone in another virtual space;

determining whether said call is directed to an avatar existing in said shared virtual space; and

if said determining step determines that said call is directed to said avatar existing in said shared virtual space, connecting said call to a virtual telephone of said avatar.

12. (Previously Presented): A conversation support method for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:

enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;

imparting a virtual public telephone usable by any enrolled avatar to said shared virtual space at a predetermined place;

determining, in response to a call to said virtual public telephone, whether a calling party who originated said call exists in said shared virtual space; and

executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made in said determination step.

13. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 12, wherein, if said calling party originated said call from a telephone in the real world, said connecting step establishes a connection with said calling party through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

14. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 8, wherein, if said calling party originated said call from a telephone in another virtual space, said connecting step establishes a connection with said telephone in said another virtual space or executes message transfer.

15. (Previously Presented): A conversation support method for supporting an activity of an avatar in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising: receiving a request for sending a message from said avatar; determining whether a destination of said message exists in the real world; and executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made by the determining step.

16. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 15, wherein, if said destination of said message is found in the real world, said step of executing connection processing establishes a connection with said destination through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

17. (Previously Presented): A conversation support method for supporting an activity of an avatar in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising: receiving a request for sending a message from a telephone in the real world through a public telephone network in the real world; determining whether a destination of said message exists in said shared virtual space; and

if said determining step determines that the destination of said messages exists in said shared virtual space, sending said message to said avatar.

/18. (Previously Presented): A program storage medium storing a computer program in a computer-readable form for executing processing on a computer system to support a virtual conversation in which a plurality of users can participate in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, said computer program comprising the steps of:

enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;

imparting a virtual public telephone usable by any enrolled avatar to said shared virtual space at a predetermined place;

determining, in response to a call to said virtual public telephone, whether a calling party who originated said call exists in said shared virtual space; and

executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made in said determination step.

19. (Cancelled)

/ 20. (Previously Presented): A program storage medium storing a computer program in a computer readable form for executing processing on a computer system to support a virtual conversation in which a plurality of users can participate in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, said computer program comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for sending a message from said avatar;

determining whether a destination of said message exists in the real world; and

executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made in the determining step.

/ 21. (Previously Presented): A program storage medium storing a computer program in a computer readable form for executing processing on a computer system to support a virtual conversation in which a plurality of users can participate in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, said computer program comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for sending a message from a telephone in the real world through a public telephone network in the real world;

determining whether a destination of said message exists in said shared virtual space;
and

if said determining step determines that the destination of said message exists in said shared virtual space, sending said message to an avatar.